

Abstract ID : 740

Title : Marine mammal strandings in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands: 2002-2003

Category : Strandings

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Poster Presentation

Abstract : Efforts to document marine mammal strandings and analyze the data gathered on each event, was continued in 2002 and 2003 in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Since January 2002, 31 events were reported by government agency officials and the general public. Cases involved carcass salvage (74%), or live animal rescues (23%). In one occasion (3%), a dead humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), was documented only by examining a videotape recording. A total of 12 species were reported stranded. West Indian manatees (*Trichechus manatus*) were reported for Puerto Rico, and in addition, one was rescued in waters of Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands, an uncommon occurrence. Other species reported included, bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*), melonhead whales (*Peponocephala electra*), pigmy killer whales (*Feresa attenuata*), false killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*), Fraser's dolphins (*Lagenodelphis hosei*), roughtooth dolphins (*Steno brenadensis*), sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), dwarf sperm whales (*Kogia simus*), and densebeak whales (*Mesoplodon densirostris*). Geographically, the area in which more events were reported for this period was the southeast coast of Puerto Rico with seven cases (23%). However the highest number of animals stranded (16%) was recorded in the municipality of Cabo Rojo on the west coast of Puerto Rico. When possible, necropsies were performed and the predominant causes of stranding found were, illness (13%), dependent calves (7%), and ingestion of debris (3%). Most of the cases (77%) were undetermined due to limited access to the carcasses or the advanced state of decomposition. In two cases (6%) live animals were immediately released. Results of histopathological analyses for 52% of the cases are still pending. The information gathered between 2002 and 2003 add to the 12 years of dedicated data collection on strandings in the region, providing government agencies with much needed information for the effective management of these species.